

# NEWSLETTER

# Opera

Ireland

## A NEW LOOK AT OLD FRIENDS

Brand new productions of two of the world's best-loved operas will be seen at the Gaiety Theatre in April. The staging of Puccini's *Tosca* is part of a unique five-way co-operation between DGOS Opera Ireland and four other European companies. The production, designed and directed by the talented French producer Eric Vigié, has already been seen in Rouen and Rennes and after Dublin it goes on to Besançon and Maastricht. Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, which will be performed in English, is the second in our Spring Mozart cycle which got underway last year with *Don Giovanni*. The series is being directed and designed by Michael McCaffery.

More than a century of prolific compositional output separates these two great works. Mozart's delectable *Die Zauberflöte* was first seen in Vienna in 1791; Puccini's masterpiece had its premiere in Rome in the very last year of the 19th century.

### The stuff of dreams

Mozart's final opera, a Singspiel which he composed in tandem with the opera seria *La clemenza di Tito* during the last year of his life, is one of the miracles of the lyric stage. Emanuel Schikaneder provided Mozart with a libretto which sets the powers of light and darkness against each other and combines folksy pantomime with Masonic humanism while throwing in an amount of Baroque spectacle for good measure. And Mozart adorned the libretto with uplifting music which has withstood the passing of more than 200 years. Beauty pervades the score, from the solemn opening chords, through the two famous bass arias, "Within these sacred bowers" and "O Isis and Osiris", to the final chorus of praise.

But interspersed with the solemnity there are many simply popular – nay, populist – tunes, notably those given to Papageno, the simple birdcatcher role written for himself by Schikaneder. Then you have the plaintive melodies of Pamina and her tenor suitor Tamino (he who plays the eponymous woodwind) and the fearsome pyrotechnics with which the Queen of Night must contend in her two fearsome arias. And that's only the solo items. Add in the many duets and larger ensembles and you have the stuff of musical dreams.

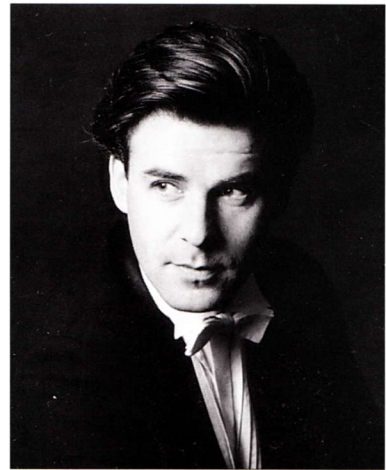
### Cara scales the heights

Cork soprano Cara O'Sullivan, winner at the Stanislaw Moniuszko Vocal Competition in Warsaw last year, is our Queen of Night and her sacerdotal antagonist will be sung by Greg Ryerson, an American bass whose repertoire



Cara O'Sullivan sings the Queen of Night in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

includes Don Giovanni and several Wagner heavies, to whose numbers he is shortly to add the role of Hans Sachs. Philip Salmon and Marina Levitt are the two lovers while Stephen Page, who will be INO's Figaro in March, assumes the feathers and bells of Papageno. The strong cast also includes Claire Daniels, Marie Walsh and Cynthia Buchan as the Three Ladies and Alexander Oliver as the evil Monostatos. David Stephenson, who made his mark as Alidoro last December, plays the important role of the Speaker. David Heusel, the American maestro who led that frisky *La Cenerentola*, returns to conduct the Mozart opera.



*Philip Salmon sings the tenor role of Tamino*

## **The diva, the painter and the chief of police**

*Tosca* is an opera which embraces many human passions. There is love in there somewhere, of course, but you also get jealousy, cynicism, sadism, murder and suicide. And all of it comes wrapped in the composer's special brand of dramatically apt music, replete with memorable set pieces and tension-packed ensembles. In the first act alone there is the tenor's rhapsodic "Recondita armonia", the extended love duet for Tosca and Cavaradossi, the spine-chilling entrance of Scarpia, and the magnificent finale in which the hypocritical police chief lusts after the prima donna while pretending to participate in the Te Deum which is taking place around him. The second act has "Vissi d'arte" and the great Tosca/Scarpia confrontation which culminates in her stabbing him to death. Act III opens with Puccini's memorable tone painting of the Roman dawn, and this is followed by Cavaradossi's "E lucevan le stelle", another long love duet, and the tragic denouement. Heady stuff.

## **An American trio**

The three main roles in *Tosca* will be sung by American artists. Soprano Jane Thorner comes with a pedigree of important engagements in opera houses stretching from her native Seattle to Europe and Tokyo, where her roles have included Verdi's Abigaille, Cherubini's Medea and Wagner's Senta, Sieglinde and Gutrune. Opposite her, as the painter Cavaradossi, will be tenor Paul Lyon, who hails from Kansas City but is now based in Bonn. In addition to singing all the major Puccini and Verdi roles his repertoire includes Hoffmann, Don José, and Florestan. As Scarpia, we welcome back baritone Max Wittges who impressed us with his Don Fernando in *Fidelio* two years ago and has since sung Wotan in Iceland Opera's *Ring* cycle. The opera will be conducted by English-born Martin Merry.

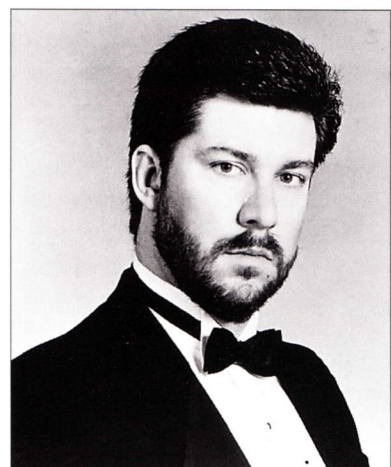
### **AN AMERICAN TRIO**



*Jane Thorner (Tosca)*



*Paul Lyon (Cavaradossi)*



*Max Wittges (Scarpia)*



# ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS

With annual funding far behind that of the average German provincial opera house, DGOS Opera Ireland is constantly in need of 'angels', enlightened Irish businesses willing to come to the aid of opera by becoming sponsors.

Recently, CPC Foods, one of the country's largest food manufacturers and makers of Napolina, Knorr and Hellmann's Mayonnaise, took the bold step of using the Napolina range of pasta and sauces to sponsor two opera productions, *La Cenerentola* last December and *Tosca* this Spring. This is the first time in the history of DGOS Opera Ireland that a major retail product has been associated with opera sponsorship. So how did the idea of linking Napolina and opera come about? Ciaran Lally, CPC Brand Development manager for Napolina, explains the thinking behind it. "Changing trends in consumer eating habits and lifestyles in the past few years have shown a growing interest in mediterranean dishes, especially Italian pasta dishes that can be prepared easily at home. With the Three Tenors phenomenon, we saw that this trend was also being mirrored in an increasing taste for opera among a wide range of people. So it made sense to link our traditional Italian pasta and sauce range with the authentic sound of Italian opera. Besides, Napolina and opera go together perfectly as a dish - a bit like Pavarotti and pasta!

"Once the decision was taken to undertake opera sponsorship, the company set to work to maximise its investment with consumer promotions and radio advertising which offered people the opportunity to win free tickets to the opera when they purchased Napolina products. Again, this type of prize was quite different from previous promotions for CPC brands. The results were encouraging, showing a growing appetite for opera among Napolina consumers.

"We found that our free opera tickets promotion was music to the ears of consumers. We ran the competition throughout the country, in seven newspapers and on five radio stations. There was a great response and we had a lot of positive comments from people who had never seen an opera before. So maybe we've done a little bit to get people hooked on opera! This season, for our sponsorship of *Tosca*, we intend to widen the net even more by bringing colleagues in the trade,



*Ciaran Lally and Patricia McDonnell with one of the in-store displays for Napolina's operan ticket offer.*

such as head office buyers, along to a night at the opera."

Ciaran Lally is quick to stress the potential benefits which a company or product may reap from involvement in opera sponsorship. In his view, it is definitely to be recommended as a marketing exercise, for a number of reasons. It can reinforce the authentic imagery of the brand, in a positive way. The link with opera is not a connection which is seen as mainstream - so it helps to differentiate the product or company. In the case of Napolina sauces, which are made in Ireland to traditional Italian recipes, there is yet another parallel - with full-blooded Italian opera being produced and staged here in Dublin by DGOS Opera Ireland.

According to Ciaran Lally, the final proof of how successful Napolina's opera sponsorship has turned out to be came when competitors tried to get in on the act and ended up by imitating the venture. Very flattering.

For CPC Foods, being on the side of the angels means that Napolina consumers are enjoying 'a real taste of Italy' in more ways than one - and Irish opera-goers in general are able to indulge their taste for the very best in Italian opera. A good reason to thank Napolina - and all the DGOS Opera Ireland sponsors - for helping to put opera on the menu this season.

**REGINA KEALY**



# THE VICISSITUDES OF OPERATIC DADDIES

## *... and memories of a notable tenor hero*

**JOHN ALLEN** takes a nostalgic look back at days past

Puccini's *Tosca* looms large in the annals of the Dublin Grand Opera Society. My own opera-going started just two weeks too late to catch the great Tito Gobbi in his only Dublin appearance as Scarpia in 1954; but I was there the following year when the legendary Maria Caniglia sang the title role. Her Cavaradossi was the American tenor Giovanni Millo (John Hammil in real life and father of Aprile Millo, one of today's outstanding Verdi sopranos). Like his partner, Millo was no lightweight: and at the point where the blood-stained painter staggered out of the torture chamber and into the arms of his beloved, and both collapsed onto a convenient couch, the Gaiety's ancient artefact proved unequal to the combined weights. There was a rending sound as one of the legs gave way and the whole thing collapsed, depositing the two lovers onto the floor. Through a wave of audible audience mirth, the singers continued, as true artists will, as though nothing had happened. But Madame Caniglia was not amused and, on the following day, found that she had to go back to Rome rather urgently. In retrospect, the real tragedy of this production was that the Scarpia, the promising baritone Antonio Manca-Serra, was to die in Dublin exactly one year later, at the age of 32.

Another operatic daddy with less than happy memories of his only Dublin engagement was Angelo Bartoli, father of the great Cecilia Bartoli, the leading Italian coloratura mezzo of our times (as



*Umberto Borsó in some of his Dublin roles.*

witnessed by her recent recordings of Sesto in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* and the title role in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*). On Easter Monday 1961 – the opening night of the four-week season – Angelo was singing Radames in Verdi's *Aida*. The tenor was patently indisposed and had to retire after the second act. To the great delight of us young tenor buffs, who should come bounding on to take up the role at “Pur ti riveggo” but the redoubtable Umberto Borsó, resplendent in Pollione wig, which role he was scheduled to sing in Bellini's *Norma* later in the season.

Borsó, a spinto tenor who was also a convincing actor and a generously committed performer, was a great favourite with Dublin audiences at the time. He made his debut here as des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut* in 1958; and between then and 1963 he sang twelve roles in all, some in more than one production. In addition to the parts already mentioned, we heard him as Calaf, Cavaradossi, Manrico, Riccardo (*Un ballo in maschera*), Turridu, Canio, Edgardo



(*Lucia di Lammermoor*) and Andrea Chenier . He also sang Don José in a bizarre performance of Bizet's *Carmen* in which he and the Carmen (Mafalda Masini) sang in Italian in an otherwise English language production.

To get back to that 1961 *Aida*: the title role was sung by the Chilean soprano Claudia Parada who, if memory serves me right, also warbled the offstage priestess's music in the temple scene. Twenty-three years later, Parada would return as a mezzo, and a sadly over-the-hill one at that, to sing Amneris in the same opera during the single season played at the acoustically wonderful Olympia Theatre.

The 1961 *Aida* was notable also for two significant debuts. One was Piero Cappuccilli, who would be the Rigoletto to Luciano Pavorotti's Duke two years later, and who was to become the supreme Verdi baritone of his generation. The other was conductor Napoleone Annovazzi, the man who was destined to play a major role in the fortunes of the DGOS during the next quarter of a century.



Maria Caniglia: her Dublin Tosca was something of a "let-down"

## INTERVAL TALK

Patrons and artists enjoying their visits to last December's productions of *Faust* and *La Cenerentola* at the Gaiety.



Sbahi Marquez, Matt Farelly and Nancy English.



*Cenerentola* herself, Alison Browner, with Ursula Keane.

*La Cenerentola* conductor David Heusel with the "ugly sisters" from that production, Katerina Beranova and Imelda Drumm.



Bernadette and David Brown.



Seamus McCrossan and Tara Fay.



Deirdre Purcell and Kevin Healy.



## BURNING ISSUES



*ASHES TO ASHS: The beautiful interior of Venice's La Fenice (The Phoenix), so named because it arose from the ashes of two previous theatres: the San Benedetto, which burned down in 1773 and its successor, the first La Fenice, which went up in flames on December 12, 1836.*

*As a novice overseas opera-goer, I am becoming increasingly alarmed by the words: 'The theatre will close for renovation . . . Recently, two of Europe's finest and most historic opera houses have been destroyed by accidental fires in the course of renovation or routine maintenance. First, the Liceu in Barcelona, completely gutted by fire on January 31st, 1994, when sparks from a welder's torch are believed to have set alight the stage curtain. Two years later, almost to the day, the 'jewelbox' theatre of Venice, La Fenice, was burnt to the ground while closed for renovation.*

A stunned Italian nation is coming to terms with the inestimable loss of this beautiful and unique 1,500 seat theatre which saw the world premieres of operas such as *Rigoletto*, *Ernani*, *La traviata* and *Simon Boccanegra*. La Fenice was the first Italian opera house in which Maria Callas sang, a few months after her debut in the Arena di Verona. Her portrait perished with everything else in the blaze .

Inevitably, questions are being asked about the lack of fire safety standards in Venice, a city built on water yet unable to save one of its greatest treasures when fire struck. Apparently, two canals had just been dredged, which hampered attempts by fire fighters to reach the scene in time .

Meanwhile, Italy mourns - and so do I. It was one of my dreams to visit Venice and attend the opera at La Fenice. The Liceu, where Caballé and Carreras made their debuts, is no more. Now La Fenice is faced with the gigantic task of rising again from the ashes, like the phoenix of its name.

Are these wonderful old theatres really such tinderboxes? Or is there an anachronistic resident opera ghost in every theatre who resents the intrusion of modern technology and electrical re-wiring? Covent Garden and San Francisco, take note. For both the War Memorial Opera House and the Royal Opera House have uttered these fateful words: 'The theatre will close for renovation...' Better check the insurance policies.

Regina Kealy.

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## OPERA LECTURES

We hope you enjoyed Henry Kelly's "Classic Hour" talk, at the National Concert Hall on Friday February 16th.

The remaining two sessions of John Allen's popular series of opera lectures will take place at Dublin's Burlington Hotel at 8 pm on Thursday February 22 and Thursday March 14. In the February lecture, John will be discussing Italian opera at the turn of the century, the

heyday of the *verismo* school and a period dominated by the stage works of people like Giordano, Mascagni, Leoncavallo and, especially, Puccini. The March lecture will be a preview of the two Spring productions, *Tosca* and *The Magic Flute*. As usual, both lectures will be enhanced by copious recorded excerpts.

Admission to these lectures is free to members and their guests as well as to all lovers of opera.



# AN OPERA HOUSE FOR DUBLIN?

**Well, maybe not an opera house; more an all-purpose music theatre, a venue suitable for opera and ballet as well as stage musicals and other entertainments. That is one of the recommendations of PIANO (Provision and Institutional Arrangements Now for Orchestras and Ensembles), the five-person review body set up by Arts Minister Michael D Higgins, in its recently issued report.**

The members of the group were John Horgan, Loretta Keating, John Kinsella and Dr Geraldine O'Grady and it was chaired by Dr John O'Connor, who is one of the four artistic patrons of DGOS Opera Ireland. The music theatre suggestion, one of a total of 23 recommendations, comes in the section of the report pertaining to the provision of orchestras for opera and ballet. The following is the full text of the relevant section:

## **Provision of Orchestras for Opera and Ballet**

It is well known that opera is a most expensive performance art form traditionally requiring a high level of State subsidy. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how the Arts Council can be expected to supply a much greater percentage of its music budget to opera than at present without other music projects suffering considerably.

## **DGOS Opera Ireland**

At present DGOS Opera Ireland uses the RTÉ CO for its productions. DGOS Opera Ireland wishes to increase its number of performances in Dublin each season and in its submission to PIANO, cites the example of the City of Nice which provides 102 nights of opera every year at a cost of £3.4m funded by the City of Nice and the Central Government. (It should be pointed out that DGOS Opera Ireland receives little funding from Dublin Corporation at present.) It states that DGOS Opera Ireland could sell 70 nights of opera per year in Dublin and that the company aims to achieve this within 15 years. PIANO feels that it would be impractical for RTÉ to provide the RTÉ CO for 70 performances per year, and in that case DGOS Opera Ireland would have to look for alternative orchestral resources.

## **Wexford Festival Opera**

The NSO has played for Wexford Festival Opera almost from the inception of the Festival. However in recent years the cost of maintaining the Orchestra in residence during the Festival has escalated, and now the cost of using the NSO constitutes 20% of the Festival's artistic budget.

## **Opera Theatre Company**

Opera Theatre Company has usually used a small orchestra made up of freelance musicians for its countrywide tours and has identified a valuable pool of instrumentalists outside of the existing orchestras.

## **Future Provision**

With the expansion of the RTÉ CO, DGOS Opera Ireland should be happy to continue to use the Concert Orchestra as before. However, if the opera season is extended RTÉ may no longer be willing to provide its Orchestra for longer periods under the present arrangements. In the circumstances it seems an appropriate time for the DGOS Opera Ireland and Wexford Festival Opera to investigate the possibility of engaging another established orchestra such as the Irish Chamber Orchestra or the Ulster Orchestra for its season, or of engaging an orchestra of freelance musicians. PIANO is satisfied that there is a sufficient number of freelance instrumentalists in this country to provide an opera orchestra of a very high standard, but recognises that DGOS Opera Ireland may decide to continue to use the RTÉ CO, and Wexford Festival Opera may decide to continue to use the NSO. One submission to PIANO made the case that with good negotiation the cost of providing such alternative orchestras would not be much more than the opera companies are paying at present. Such orchestras could also be used for major ballet performances.

## **A Music Theatre for Dublin**

We can be very proud of the high standard of our young singers today, particularly with their successes abroad. However real progress in opera cannot be achieved until there is a suitable theatre available in Dublin on a permanent basis. Dublin is one of the few major European cities without an opera house - many cities have two or more. The existing Dublin theatres are not at all acoustically suitable for music, and in particular for singing. The larger venues charge high commercial rates,

while the smaller venues cannot accommodate an orchestra and are too small for full-scale productions of opera.

Without a proper venue it is difficult to see how a national opera company can evolve. Welsh National Opera (founded in 1946, five years after the DGOS) emerged as a force in opera in the U.K. in the late 1950s after its move to the New Theatre, Cardiff in 1954. While it is certain that no national Irish opera company will be in a position to occupy a theatre on a full-time basis for many years, there is already considerable demand for a suitable music theatre now.

PIANO recommends the establishment of a 'Music Theatre' rather than an 'Opera House'. This would provide a proper venue for the established opera companies as well as being available for professional hire to the excellent semi-professional and amateur groups such as the Rathmines and Rathgar Musical Society and the Glasnevin Musical Society. It would also provide a base for any new ballet initiative and for the increasing number of visiting dance companies as well as providing a suitable venue for the production of contemporary musicals. In addition, it would generate a genuine need for another full-time orchestra with further employment for musicians.

While the capital costs of such a venture may seem daunting, PIANO recommends that a Working Group be set up to investigate the many possibilities for such a theatre - adapting an existing theatre, building a small 400 seat theatre such as the Britten Opera Theatre at the Royal College of Music in London which cost just £1 million in 1986, or emulating the highly successful, newly completed Glyndebourne building which came in under budget at £33 million.

PIANO recommends that the building of a music theatre be funded in part, at least, from the £26 million allocated to Performance Venues in the Cultural Development Initiative Scheme of the National Plan.

## IRISH OPERA DIARY

### Spring 1996

Information as available at end of January

#### **Irish Operatic Repertory Company**

Cork, Imperial Hotel  
Booking (021) 506133  
GALA OPERA CONCERT  
Feb 19, 8 pm

#### **DGOS Opera Ireland**

Dublin, Burlington Hotel  
Admission free  
LECTURE ON ITALIAN VERISMO OPERA  
February 22, 8 pm

#### **Lyric Opera**

Dublin, National Concert Hall  
Booking (01) 671 1533  
*LA TRAVIATA* (Verdi - concert perf)  
February 22, 8 pm

#### **Opera Theatre Company**

Dublin, RDS Concert Hall, Feb 23 & 24  
Athlone, RTC Hall, Feb 27  
Wexford, Theatre Royal, Feb 29  
Galway, Town Hall Theatre, March 5  
Derry, St Columb's Theatre, March 7  
Dundalk, Town Hall, March 9  
Booking (01) 679 4962  
*ZAÏDE* (Mozart)

#### **Opera Northern Ireland**

Belfast, Grand Opera House  
Booking (081232) 241919  
*THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO* (Mozart)  
March 2, 5, 7 & 9, 7.30 pm  
GALA CONCERT (Suzanne Murphy & Donald Maxwell)  
March 8, 7.30 pm

#### **Compagnia d'Opera Italiana di Milano**

Cork, Opera House, March 7 & 8, 8 pm  
Booking (021) 270022  
Limerick, University Concert Hall, March 9, 8 pm  
Booking (061) 331549  
*UN BALLO IN MASCHERA* (Verdi)

#### **DGOS Opera Ireland**

Dublin, Burlington Hotel  
Admission free  
LECTURE ON *TOSCA* AND *THE MAGIC FLUTE*  
March 14, 8 pm

#### **DGOS Opera Ireland**

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre  
Booking (01) 677 1717  
*TOSCA* (Puccini)  
April 11, 13, 15, 17, 19 & 21, 7.30 p.m.  
*THE MAGIC FLUTE* (Mozart)  
April 14, 16, 18 & 20, 7.30 p.m.



# OPERA AT HOME

**JOHN ALLEN** recommends some recent Italian, Russian, German and French Operas sets on CD

*It has been a busy time for the record companies, who have issued a plethora of opera sets on Compact Disk during the past few months. Some of these are studio made, others are live off the stage. They include brand new recordings and re-issues of old ones; and the performances are a mixture of good, bad and indifferent. Happily, we are concerned here only with the good ones.*

Italian opera first, and a warm welcome for the Solti set of Verdi's *La traviata* (Decca 2CD set 448 119-2), recorded live at Covent Garden and featuring the exciting Romanian soprano Angela Gheorghiu. To my ears, this is the perfect Violetta voice and temperament, replete with all the necessary lyricism and agility as well as a keen musical intelligence. American tenor Frank Lopardo may lack the liquid timbre of, say, a Bergonzi; but he too is an intelligent singer, as you would expect from a pupil of Robert White, and portrays an ardent Alfredo. Leo Nucci, the only Italian in the cast, is a dry-as-dust Germont, which somehow suits the character of this unsympathetic old hypocrite.

Talking of Carlo Bergonzi reminds me to mention the bargain re-issue of the 1962 DG *Il trovatore* (DG Double 2CD set 445 451-2) in which his peerless Manrico can be heard alongside the Leonora of Antonietta Stella and the Azucena and Luna of Fiorenza Cossotto and Ettore Bastiani in a performance conducted by the great Italian maestro Tullio Serafin. This is a must for all Verdi lovers.

Montserrat Caballé and Alfredo Krauss are the stars of EMI Classics budget re-issue of the 1979 recording of Bellini's *I puritani*, (3CD set CMS7 69663-2). Riccardo Muti directs an uncut performance, and he does so with beautifully sprung rhythms, albeit with unswerving fidelity to the printed score – the singers are not allowed to stray from the printed page by inserting anything as unscholarly as a decoration or an unwritten high note. But when they have voices like Caballé and Krauss, who cares?

Rossini authority Alberto Zedda directs a zipping performance of that composer's *Tancredi* for Naxos (2CD set 8.660.037/8). The juxtaposition of heavy-weight Polish mezzo Eva Podles in the title role and the considerably lighter Korean soprano Sumi Jo as Amenaide works surprisingly well and the set could be strongly recommended at any price, let alone the low Naxos one.

## Wexford on disc

Marco Polo have issued Anton Rubinstein's *The Demon* (2CD set 8.220 451) recorded at Wexford in 1994. Notwithstanding the intrusive stage noise and the many cuts – we lose all of the ballet music,



Anatoly Lochak and Marina Mescheriakova in Rubinstein's *The Demon* at Wexford in 1994.

some of the entr'actes and a sizeable chunk of the Act III convent cell confrontation – this is well worth hearing. Rubinstein's tuneful score, which has a certain French aura, is authoritatively conducted by Alexander Anissimov. Apart from the big ensembles and the tenor's brief appearance before he is killed off in Act 1 – a scene cleanly sung by the young Leonid Zimenko – the meat of the opera belongs to the two central characters, Princess Tamara (soprano) and her demonic pursuer. Baritone Anatoly Lochak, who was something of a dull dog on stage, here sounds positively romantic as the frustrated suitor and he and the rich-voiced Marina Mescheriakova take all their chances, most notably in that long convent cell encounter. There are good performances also from basses Richard Robson and Leonid Zimnenko as well as from our own Alison Browner as the Angel.

Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* (Philips 2CD set 446-078-2) gets a searing performance from the forces of the Kirov Opera under Valery Gergiev. This amalgam of religious mysticism and sexual passion is not recommended for musical cowards; but for anyone who appreciates music theatre at its most compelling, it is essential listening. Galina Gorchakova is a sensational as the obsessed Renata and she is matched by the incisive baritone of Sergei Leiferkus and a cast of the best of the Kirov's regulars.

Also from the Kirov comes Borodin's epic *Prince Igor* (Philips 3CD set 442 537-2), again under the firm, if somewhat measured, control of Valery Gergiev and with a fine cast of Russian singers, headed by Mikhail Kit (a name new to me, and impressive in his great monologue) in the title role and the exciting if occasionally wayward Gorchakova as his wife. Bulat Minjelkiev's Kahn Konchak also has its uncontrolled moments, but Vladimir Ogonovenko is consistently firm-voiced in his portrayal of the slimy Galitzky. There is luxury casting in the Polovtsian scenes where Olga Borodina lends her silky mezzo to the role of the Khan's daughter Konchakovna and Gegan Grigorian is in fine form as Igor's son Vladimir. And Gergiev and his Kirov chorus make rather a splendid thing of the famous dance sequence.



## A Wagnerian feast

On the new *Parsifal* from James Levine and his Metropolitan Opera forces (DG 4 CD set 437 501-2) the quality of orchestral playing is magnificent and the chorus, an important element in this work, sings splendidly. James Morris as Amfortas and Kurt Moll as Gurnemanz are well inside their characters, as is Jessye Norman, whose Kundry is one of the best things she has done on record. Her velvety tone in the garden scene in Act 2 is unbelievably seductive. The ubiquitous Plácido Domingo sings the title role warmly, but with nothing like the same insight as his colleagues. There are many moments of great aural beauty here but, be warned, Levine takes it all very, very slowly – even more slowly than I remember him conducting it at Bayreuth 12 years ago.

Staying with Wagner, there are two issues of his comic masterpiece *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Wolfgang Sawallisch, who directs his Bavarian State orchestra and chorus as well as an outstanding cast of principals on EMI's recording (4 CD set CDS5 55142-2), is probably the last of the great Wagner conductors. His warm, unmannered way with the long score is abetted by fine singing from Bernd Weikl as Hans Sachs (very much the people's poet, this) and Cheryl Studer, charming and musically intelligent as Eva. Best of all is Canadian Heldentenor Ben Heppner as the Walther of one's dreams. Heppner's youthful splendour eclipses Gunther Treptow's honest efforts on the rival Decca set, a re-issue of Hans Knappertsbusch's trail-blazing 1950/51 recording (4 CD set 440 057-2). Knappertsbusch's conducting is more subtle than Sawallisch, in keeping with the soul-searching nature of Paul Schöffler's classic Sachs, but Hilde Gueden's girlish Eva loses points to Studer. Of course the 40-year-old sound cannot compare with EMI's sonic grandeur, but the set is essential as a record of Knappertsbusch's authoritative account of the glorious score.

No fewer than four different versions of *Lohengrin* have appeared in recent months. In the two new recordings, the best elements are Cheryl Studer's Elsa for Abbado (DG 3CD set 437 808-2) and Ben Heppner's glorious Lohengrin for Davis (RCA Victor 3CD set 09026 62646-2). On mid-price re-issues there is Wolfgang Sawallisch's atmospheric reading at Bayreuth in 1962, starring Jess Thomas and Anja Silja (Philips 3CD set 446 337-2), and an older mono set from EMI classics in which Rudolf Schock's hero is almost upstaged by Josef Metternich's wonderful singing as Telramund (3CD set CHS5 6551-7-2).

## Dohnányi by two

The new Decca *Salome* (2CD set 444 178-2) is the fourth major recording of Strauss's opera to have appeared in as many years. It stems from the critically acclaimed Luc Bondy production of the opera which was first seen at Salzburg three years ago and has since travelled to other opera houses. All of the major roles in the recording are taken by the singers who appeared in the original production. These are Kenneth Riegel as Herod, Hanna Schwarz as Herodias, Bryn Terfel as Jochanaan (his second recording of John the Baptist) and American soprano Catherine Malfitano in the title role. Malfitano is essentially a lyric soprano whose girlish tones, while lacking the clout for the great climaxes, are just what the composer wanted (he repeatedly tried to get

Elisabeth Schumann to take on the role). And, of course, we also have the same conductor and the magnificent Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Christoph von Dohnányi takes an objective view of the score. He never overstates things, not even in the Dance of the Seven Veils, but makes his effects by a calculated control of pace and dynamics. Which isn't to say that there is any short-changing on excitement when called for.

And much of the above applies to Dohnányi's way with *Das Rheingold* (Decca 2CD set 442 690-2), the first instalment of a new Ring cycle being recorded in Cleveland. Robert Hale is the strongly projected Wotan opposite whom Hanna Schwarz brings such glorious tones to the role of his wife Frika that you wonder how he could possibly neglect her for other women. Franz-Joseph Kapellmann, a compelling Alberic whose dark bass I look forward to renewing acquaintance with later in the series, is a new name to me – unlike Mime, who is the redoubtable Peter Schreier of all people. And for historical voice specialists there is Pearl's resurrection of the famous HMV potted Ring which originally came out on individual 78s between 1927 and 1932 (7CD set GEMM CDS 9137). Here are Leider and Schorr and Melchior and all those other legendary Wagnerians of the inter-war years whose voices, many people consider, have never been surpassed.

## A little late Mozart

Space precludes more than a brief mention of two superb recordings of Mozart's penultimate opera, *La clemenza di Tito*. Cecilia Bartoli is a splendid Sesto for Christopher Hogwood who directs an original instrument performance on L'oiseau-lyre (2CD set 444 131-2). And there are equally good performances from Della Jones, Barbara Bonney and Diana Montague. Uwe Heilmann in the title role is a fine Mozart tenor who sounds not unlike Leopold Simoneau back in the 1950s and early '60s. Riccardo Muti's live Salzburg reading on EMI Classics (2 CD set CDS5 55489-2) is one of enormous vitality. His strong cast boasts Carol Vaness as a commanding Vitellia alongside Dolores Ziegler's Sesto and Göste Winberg's Tito.

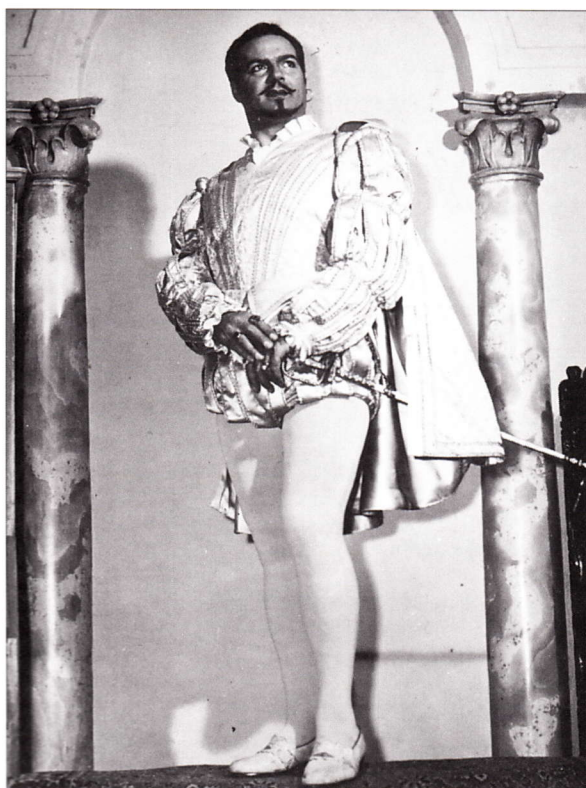
## French delights

Two French operas, one from each half of the 19th century, have appeared lately. Auber's *Le domino noir* (Decca 2CD set 440 646-2) is a joyous piece, light as thistledown and treated accordingly by Richard Bonyngé. His singers offer such mellifluousness that one can easily overlook the clash of styles between the main principals, Sumi Jo, Bruce Ford and Partrick Power, and their French colleagues. Massenet's *Herodiade* (EMI Classics 3 CD set CDS5 55378-2) is a much more serious affair. Why this beautiful opera has remained unrecorded until now remains a mystery; but, however late in the day, this set has been well worth the wait. Ben Heppner, my current favourite among the heavyweights, is a characterful and ringing tenor John the Baptist and he is matched by Cheryl Studer's well-sung Salome (There is more romance between this pair in this opera than in Strauss's version). Nadine Denize, in the title role, is less of the tigress you expect here but Hampson is in splendid voice as her husband and gives a noble account of the well-known "Vision fugitive". José van Dam is strongly cast as the soothsayer and the whole thing is authoritatively conducted by Michel Plasson.



## SILVERI LOOKS BACK

*The Fantastic Life of Paolo Silveri*, the autobiography of the great Italian baritone whose burnished tones and striking stage presence graced many a DGOS season in the 1950s, has recently appeared in an English translation by T Mattei. Silveri, who now lives in retirement in Rome, was particularly successful in Verdi roles and the present writer recalls his thrilling *Rigoletto*, *Luna* and *Renato* at the Gaiety Theatre. The early chapters of the book, which was originally published in 1993, recall his Abruzzi childhood and adolescence as well as giving colourful details of his early career efforts – everything from the priesthood to prize fighting. Otherwise it is mainly a chronicle of what the singer recalls as a triumphant career, a career which took in most of the world's major opera centres and included a period at Covent Garden where he sang his roles, including *Boris Godunov*, in English. There is ne'er a mention of anything less than well-received performances. Even his relations with fellow artists – Ljuba Welitsch and Risë Stephens apart – seem to have been all milk and honey. But then we must remember that Silveri is now in his 80s and probably looking back through rose-tinted spectacles.



*Paolo Silveri as Don Giovanni.*



*Paolo Silveri as Rigoletto with Gianni Raimondi as The Duke of Mantua, Dublin 1955.*

Silveri makes frequent mention of his Dublin appearances, starting with Rossini's *Figaro* in 1952. What compromises the validity of these memories is the naive account of his triumph in what was in reality a catastrophic assumption of the tenor role of *Otello* at the Gaiety in 1959. The Dublin music critics whose reviews are quoted ought to be ashamed of themselves. Notwithstanding the memory lapses, there is much to enthral the reader. At 200 pages the book is relatively short; but there are 47 fascinating photographs, many of the baritone in stage costume and others with colleagues and personalities ranging from Titta Ruffo and Beniamino Gigli to Sophia Loren and Eamon De Valera.

**JA**

*The Fantastic Life of Paolo Silveri* is not generally available in Ireland, but anyone interested in obtaining a copy should contact: **John O'Flynn, Artistic Director, Irish Operatic Repertory Company, Kinlay House, Shandon, Cork. Tel: (021) 506133**

# EUROPEAN OPERA FESTIVALS

Summer/Autumn 1996

Information as available at end of January

## Florence, Italy

Maggio Musicale: May 2-Jun 27

Box Office: Tel 0039 55 211 158;

Fax 0039 55 277 9410

*IDOMENEO* (Mozart)

*ELEKTRA* (Strauss)

*LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR* (Donizetti)

*IL PRIGIONIERO* (Dallapiccola)

## Glyndebourne, England

May 17-Aug 25

Glyndebourne, Lewes, East Sussex BN8 5UU

Box Office: Tel 0044 1273 813 813;

Fax 0044 1273 812 686

*THEODORA* (Handel)

*COSI FAN TUTTE* (Mozart)

*YEVGENY ONEGIN* (Tchaikovsky)

*ARABELLA* (Strauss)

*LULU* (Berg)

*ERMIONE* (Rossini)

## Amsterdam, Netherlands

May 31-Jun 30

Waterlooplein 22, 1011 PG Amsterdam

Box Office: Tel 0031 20 551 8922;

Fax 0031 20 551 8311

*A KING RIDING* (de Vries)

*OEDIPE* (Enesco)

*OTELLO* (Verdi)

*MARCO POLO* (Tan Dun)

*LEONORE* (Beethoven)

## Munich, Germany

July 1-31

Maximilianstrasse 11, D-80539 München

Box Office: Tel 0049 89 2185 1920;

Fax 0049 89 2185 1903

*SIMONE BOCCANEGRA* (Verdi)

*TANNHÄUSER* (Wagner)

*ANNA BOLENA* (Donizetti)

*COSI FAN TUTTE* (Mozart)

*AIDA* (Verdi)

*IDOMENEO* (Mozart)

*LE DAMNATION DE FAUST* (Berlioz)

*XERXES* (Handel)

*PARSIFAL* (Wagner)

*LA TRAVIATA* (Verdi)

*DER ROSENKAVALIER* (Strauss)

*DON GIOVANNI* (Mozart)

*DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG* (Wagner)

## Savonlinna, Finland

Jul 6-Aug 3

Olavinkatu 27, FIN-57130 Savonlinna

Box Office: Tel 00358 57-57 67 50;

Fax 00358 57-531 866

*DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER* (Wagner), *MAZEPPA*

(Tchaikovsky), *TANNHÄUSER* (Wagner), *THE PALACE* (Sallinen)

*MACBETH* (Verdi)

## Salzburg, Austria

Jul 20-Aug 31

Box Office: Tel 0043 662 84 4501;

Fax 0043 662 84 6682

*THE RAKE'S PROGRESS* (Stravinsky)

*OBERON* (Weber)

*DON GIOVANNI* (Mozart)

*ELEKTRA* (Strauss)

*FIDELIO* (Beethoven)

*LE NOZZE DI FIGARO* (Mozart)

*LEONORE* (Beethoven)

*MOSES UND ARON* (Schoenberg)

## Bregenz, Austria

Jul 20-Aug 22

Kartenbüro, A-6901, Bregenz

Box Office: Tel 0043 5574 4920224;

Fax 0043 5574 4920228

*LE ROI ARTHUS* (Chausson)

*FIDELIO* (Beethoven)

## Bayreuth, Germany

Wagner Festival Jul 25-Aug 28

Postbox 10 02 62, D-95402, Bayreuth

Box Office: Tel 0049 921 202 21

*DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG*

*TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*

*DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN*

*PARSIFAL*

## Wexford, Ireland

Oct 17-Nov 3

Theatre Royal, Wexford

Box Office: Tel (053) 22400;

Fax (053) 24289

*PARISINA* (Donizetti)

*L'ETOILE DU NORD* (Meyerbeer)

*SARKA* (Fibich)

Box office information for festivals which have not yet announced their 1996 programmes.

## Verona, Italy

Jul-Aug

Piazza Biza 28, Verona

Box Office: Tel 0039 94 800 5151;

Fax 0039 94 801 3287

1996 programme not yet announced

## Drottningholm, Sweden

Jul-Aug

Box Office: Tel 0046 8 660 8225;

Fax 0046 8 665 1473

1996 programme not yet announced

## Pesaro, Italy

August

Rossini Festival

Via Rossini, Pesaro

Box Office: Tel 0039 721 301 61;

Fax 0039 721 309 79

1996 programme not yet announced

## Aix-en-Provence, France

July

Espace Forbin, 3 Place Rewald,

13160 Aix-en-Provence

Box Office: Tel 0033 4221 6969;

Fax 0033 4221 9165

## Orange, France

Jul-Aug

BP 205, 18 Place Silvain, 84107 Orange

Box Office: Tel 0033 9034 2424; Fax 0033 9034 8767

## Macerata, Italy

Associazione Arena Sferisterio,

Via Santa Maria della Porta 65, 62100 Macerata

Box Office: Tel 0039 733 261 334/5;

Fax 0039 733 233 50